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SUBJECT: ARS SPEAKER EDUARDO CUE: CORRUPTION OR
CREDIBILITY, "YOU MUST CHOOSE"

REF: KINSHASA 137

1. Summary: In a high-quality, versatile performance, ARS Speaker Eduardo Cue, the Paris-based U.S. News and World Report Correspondent, led two full-day workshops for 60 journalists and lectured to another 50 students of journalism in Kinshasa, February 1-3. With a studied mix of ethical, theoretical and practical lessons, Mr. Cue strongly made the point that Congolese journalists had the responsibility to fight corruption within the profession, if democracy was truly to take root in the DRC. He said journalists have no choice but to avoid conflict of interest and its appearance. While our professional participants pondered that hard lesson, Eduardo Cue made the same point with practical composition exercises which focused on electoral campaign reporting, our overall theme. Mr. Cue expanded his message on the compatibility of democracy and free, responsible press in t.v., radio, and print interviews. With his serious approach and vast experience, Mr. Cue established his credibility, which seemed to make our participants more attentive to his rather tough message. End Summary

2. Our 60 journalists (of 70 designated by their media organizations) came mostly from Kinshasa. We also arranged for six of them to come from the Bas-Congo province as well. Half were radio and television journalists, who participated on February 1, and the other half were print journalists, who convened the next day. All were supplied Nouveaux Horizons publications in advance: A Vous l'Antenne (Paul De Maeseneer) for the t.v. and radio journalists, and Pratique du Journalisme (Schulte and Dufresne) for both groups. Many from both groups submitted samples of their work in advance for class exercises.

Difficult Moral and Professional Choices

3. Eduardo Cue, who has made regular visits to Africa since 1991 and speaks flawless French, made the case that democracy depended on a free press, and both were corrupted by the temptation to do favors for politicians. Journalists are nothing without their credibility, Cue said, and credibility is the first victim of corruption. One could not be both a reporter and a press attach or advisor to a government ministry, he said, however common the practice in Africa. Following expressions of incredulity and resistance to this stricture, Cue talked about his own case when he was spokesman for the UNHCR in Chad and Colombia. During those stints, he suspended all journalistic activity; moreover, Cue said, he could not write about the UNHCR for quite some time afterwards.

4. Cue insisted journalists had no choice between corruption and establishing their credibility. Perhaps they would have to be a "sacrificial generation" of starving, but principled, journalists for the good of African reporters to follow. But, he added, "You have more power than you think." Cue exhorted them to try to report both sides of a story, even if they work for an organization with a very political agenda; maybe it will slip by the editors. He cited cases of Soviet and East Bloc reporters before 1989. Submit your questions in advance of an interview, if you must, in order to get an audience, Cue continued, but ask your unscripted questions, toward the end of the interview, anyway. You might get lucky, and you will win respect, he said. Examples emerged from the participants about their attempts to stand up for principle. One radio journalist described how he quit a station in Kasai province over a censored report. Cue suggested removing one's name from a report, if, after editing, it no longer reflected the truth. Others described how doors close on them, if they start to earn a reputation for independence. Cue urged them to persevere and not succumb to insidious self-censorship.

15. Each workshop began with a presentation by a Congolese university professor on journalistic practices. Eduardo Cue made good use of their content. For example, Professor Budimbani Yambu said journalists needed to know more than just current events, but also

politico-historical context ("la chose politique") to inform their lines of inquiry. Cue referred to Budimbani's point at least twice. In a broader discussion about how (poorly) the U.S. press informed the American public about French views during the build-up to the Iraq War, Cue said no American media drew parallels with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution 40 years earlier. In another example, Cue rhetorically asked if any American journalists discussed why the President left out China when listing the salient undemocratic countries in his State of the Union address. "It was not an oversight."

Practical Exercises -----

16. Eduardo Cue made some excellent practical points by taking the perspective of the consumer, be he viewer, listener, or reader. During a discussion about protecting sources, Cue said that readers often think that the use of anonymous sources means the reporter is inventing information. Get quotes and name their authors, he repeated.

17. After studying in advance the taped and written submissions of the participants, Eduardo Cue selected very instructive examples of good and bad practice, provoking lively discussion both days. All samples dealt with some aspect of electoral campaign reporting, since that was our overall theme. Always taking the perspective of the consumer, Cue used the homework assignments to show how, and how quickly, the viewer/listener/reader lost interest. Subjects had to be narrowly chosen, like a radio example we used of how bed-ridden hospital patients will vote, or an article explaining the stops inside a polling station. Television images had to be lively and speakers clearly identified, radio needs ambient noises, and written articles need an angle. Cue made the point that approaches were very different for the various media, and, with accomplished versatility, he drew on his 30-year experience in both print and television (as CNN's Spanish-language correspondent in Paris, for example).

18. Eduardo Cue also used the anonymous examples to make ethical points, especially when it came to reports which unabashedly praised a particular political candidate. Even as propaganda, Cue said, they were poorly done, which provoked some mirth. He especially criticized examples where the reporter resorted to rumors, unproven allegations, or suppositions. All such examples exhibited lack of rigor and hard work, and a tendency, Cue said, of reporters to sit at their keyboard, adding, "No one cares about your opinion." For one of the last articles he himself wrote, Cue said he spent a week just talking to people.

School of Journalism -----

19. On February 3, Eduardo Cue held forth before 50 students and faculty at IFASIC, Kinshasa's School of Journalism. He made similar points about the role of a free press in a democracy and about journalistic ethics. Following a question from one of the students, Cue led a lively discussion about how far reporters should delve into the private lives of politicians and other public figures. He especially encouraged women journalists, observing they often have a better intuitive sense of what is newsworthy.

Cue's Interviews -----

10. On the margins of his presentations, Eduardo Cue was interviewed and made the point that Congolese reporters needed to foster the freedoms afforded by democracy by exercising fair and objective journalism. The following print media sought him out for interviews: Le Potentiel, Le Potentiel-Bas Congo, L'Avenir, La Reference Plus, Uhuru, and Le Journal du Citoyen. Articles were published in Le Potentiel, Uhuru, and Le Phare. Electronic media interviews were with Antenne A, Horizon 33, Digital Congo, and Radio Okapi. We will forward many of these to ARS. The PAO

was interviewed separately by Antenne A, Horizon 33, and Radio Okapi.

11. Comment: We are very happy with Eduardo Cue's contribution to our efforts to encourage a free and responsible press in the DRC. Mr. Cue quickly established his own credibility, and convinced his audiences that he understood African realities well. Mr. Cue's approach was serious, and he gained respect by pulling no punches. He did not put American or Western journalism on a pedestal, which made his tough message on professional standards seem even more universal to our participants. End Comment

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